
CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

FOR INFORMATION

Title: CEO REPORT AND CONVENER UPDATE

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Purpose

1. To highlight to Board Members the main strategic areas of work that are being directed by Management Team. These are areas where significant staff resources are being directed to deliver with partners the aspirations of the National Park Partnership Plan.

Conservation

1. **Cairngorms Nature:** The first Cairngorms Nature Big Weekend post Covid was a huge success, it was a demonstration of brilliant collaborative working as colleagues and partners came together to deliver over 70 events across the CNP, with the launch and closing flagship events as the highlights of the weekend.

The events ranged in format from self-guided trails to specialist activities with experts, including behind the scenes tours of estates, tree climbing, discussion events, ceilidhs and dedicated events for young people with disabilities. We are currently gathering feedback from attendees and event providers, and early insights show that approx. 30% of attendees travelled from outside the Park and over two thirds are residents.

2. **Cairngorms Capercaillie Project:** Positive progress has been made against all of the project's approved purposes. The quarterly report to National Lottery Heritage Fund highlights the programme is well advanced and on track to deliver project outcomes. The community action plans are all underway and at various stages of delivery. Habitat works and predator management continue to improve conditions and the genetic survey work remains on track. The Project Board will consider at their June Meeting if a project extension request is appropriate, primarily to accommodate delays brought about by working through Covid. The Board will also consider at that meeting how the project can dovetail with emerging work from the SAC review.
3. **Woodland Creation:** Since 1st March we have been consulted by Scottish Forestry about woodland creation proposals of varying scale at Mar Lodge and Dunachton estates and we anticipate formal consultations soon relating to Invercauld and Glenbancher estates. We have also been informally consulted about potential woodland creation proposals at Atholl, Glen Clova, Inchmarnoch, Delnabo and Ardverikie estates.

4. **Peatland Restoration:** A total of 730ha of peatland were put under restoration in 2021/22 which exceeded the target of 570ha. In 2022/23 the target for restoration is 905ha. Capital and resource funding has been confirmed at 2.8million and 0.5 million respectively for this financial year. Stephen Corcoran has left CNPA for a new challenge and we are grateful for the enormous contribution he made to Peatland Action. We will take this opportunity to restructure the Peatland Team with the aim of increasing capacity to meet the demands of an expanding portfolio of works and associated processes and strategic issues. In the short term this re-structuring will increase the workload on an already stretched team. For this reason much of the restoration focus this year will be on drain blocking which is easier to plan and manage.

5. **Moorland Management:** Lorna Slater, Minister for Green Skills, Circular Economy and Biodiversity, attended a meeting in April with members of the East Cairngorm Moorland Partnership to discuss moorland management, peatland restoration and deer management. We are working with estates in the ECMP on communications to highlight where moorland management delivers the objectives in the NPPP and to agree an action plan for this year and beyond.

At a national level CNPA are represented on the Grouse Moor Licensing Board which is developing new legislation which will cover grouse shooting and muirburn. We have held informal discussions with numerous grouse estates on how best to make licensing work. This work is progressing rapidly and the aim is for proposals to be subject to a public consultation in the autumn.

6. **Deer Management:** Open range red deer were counted across most of the Park in March 2022. Results provide an up to date estimate of deer numbers for both estates and agencies and will feed into the Strategic Land Use Plans (SLUP) being developed across three Deer Management Groups (DMGs). Work has now begun on developing the SLUPs for the West Grampians DMG and for South Deeside and North Angus DMG. The tendering process for work with the South Grampians DMG was unsuccessful and we are currently trying to develop an alternative solution. CNPA staff are directly involved in the taking forward the recommendations of the Deer Working Group and the CNPA CEO chairs the workstream to develop incentives for better deer management as well as sitting on the Strategic Board.

7. **Managing for Visitors:** The Managing for Visitors group is now meeting fortnightly and will do so until the end of October. Overall feedback from key hotspots sites remains positive with staff and infrastructure largely able to cope with the visitor numbers and pressures. This reflects the national picture with most hotspot areas in Scotland, such as East Lothian, North West Highlands and Highland Perthshire, being busy but able to cope with demands. RSPB Scotland are recruiting additional ranger staff at Abernethy NNR.

8. **Tread Lightly in the Park:** The general Tread Lightly in the Park leaflet has been updated and is being distributed to locations around the Park and surrounding areas via Landmark Press. Two new Tread Lightly in the Park posters have been developed with messaging around dogs in the countryside using the 'Take the Lead' strapline

(livestock and ground nesting birds). These have been printed and are available to land managers and ranger services on request.

9. **Long Distance Routes:** Speyside Way improvements continue to be progressed following delays resulting from Covid restrictions with repairs to the path at Insh village carried out successfully late last year and more recently a full surface upgrade to the existing path at Drumguish was completed in late February. Signage upgrades to be completed between Insh and Ruthven Barracks over the next few months. Additional signage will be installed along Grampian Road in Aviemore over the summer to improve navigation between the northern and southern ends of the town with work also being carried out to design and implement gradient reduction measures at two locations south of Aviemore near Speybank and Kinrara.

Works have commenced on the Braemar to Keiloch path the main focus being hand building the middle section that traverses steep ground next to the roadside. A review is about to start at the section on the north side of the Dee at the Keiloch to find the best line. Discussions with the estate and planning authority will be undertaken over the next few months to finalise that new line.

10. **Active Cairngorms:** A new community path leaflet has been produced and printed for Kinraig. The path leaflets for Aviemore, Grantown-on-Spey and Kingussie have also been updated, re-printed and distributed. Over the summer month's staff will be working with the communities of Strathdon and Newtonmore to update their path leaflets.
11. **Ranger Services:** The CNPA Ranger Service is fully operational this season. We have recruited 4 trainee rangers who will begin on 20th June and we are recruiting two more seasonal Rangers for Deeside. Collaboration with partner Ranger Services is going very well with processes and procedures now well-known after two years of operation.
12. **Volunteering and Health Walks:** Becky Wilson has joined us as Volunteering Manager filling in for Mike Woolvin. We are increasing the number of opportunities for volunteers and for Volunteer Rangers through continued collaboration with partners.

Rural Development

13. **Planning Guidance:** The Planning Committee recently approved Develop Obligations and design and Placemaking Supplementary Guidance for submission to Scottish Ministers and will be asked to approve Housing Supplementary Guidance in June 2022 as the final element of guidance to accompany the Local Development Plan 2021.
14. **Planning Casework:** Over the past three months, the Planning Committee has approved housing in Killiecrankie, estate/farm workers housing on Balavil Estate and the redevelopment of the Struan Hotel in Carrbridge as affordable housing by Highland Council. The Committee also approved short sections of vehicle access track and a small network of mountain bike tracks on Cairngorm Mountain and

refused an application for chalet accommodation associated with the Clova Hotel in Glen Clova. We expect an application for community-led affordable housing in Braemar to be presented to the Planning Committee in June 2022.

15. **Housing Delivery:** The Rural Development and Communities team has welcomed Kirsty Partridge into post this quarter, with a background in housing and rural development, previously working with the Communities Housing Trust (CHT). We will continue to work with communities identified through our ongoing work with Cairngorm Business Partnership and those identified through Community Action Planning who are looking to develop affordable housing. Glenlivet and Tomintoul Development Trust (GTDT) are in the process of applying for Stage 1 feasibility Rural Housing Fund for the former Highland Spring site in Braes of Glenlivet. We are in support of this application for funding. Their construction of 12 new affordable houses, delivered by TGDT are slightly delayed, and likely to be available by August 2022 in the former school site.
16. **Wellbeing Economy:** WEAll Scotland are continuing to progress the development stage of this work as part of Heritage Horizons: Cairngorms 2030. Questions were included in Cairngorm Business Partnership Business Barometer for Q1 to investigate levels of understanding and attitudes to a wellbeing economy, which suggest currently a low level of knowledge amongst businesses but a high level of interest to learn more and get to be involved.

Key stakeholders have been identified, and the monitoring, evaluation and learning approach has been agreed between CNPA and WEAll Project lead. The work is progressing to establish a working group and an update to be provided to the Economic Steering Group on 6th June.

17. **Tourism Action Plan:** Our 4th submission for Charter accreditation is due to take place in December 2022, planning for the period 2023-2027. In the previous submission, for the period 2017-2022, the main strategy document submitted was the National Park Partnership Plan for that period. This reflected a holistic view of sustainable tourism's links to, and interdependence with, other areas of policy within the plan. A more focused and targeted action plan for tourism is currently being developed to set out delivery priorities. A workshop to develop this further will take place at the 15th June Cairngorm Tourism Partnership to develop the TAP further and will come back to the CNPA Board during Autumn, prior to EUROPARC submission during December.
18. **Tourism and Business Data: BB Summary** The Quarter 1 summary from the Cairngorm Business Barometer is available [here](#). Key highlights highlight that most businesses are able to operate at normal levels, with 3/5 businesses reporting higher numbers of customers and turnover than the same period in 2021, or Q4 in 2021 for comparison. There are concerns over barriers to growth, which are having a negative impact on businesses, primarily staff costs, supplier costs, and suitable housing for staff to live in.
19. **Glenmore Sustainable Transport Plan:** Traffic monitoring took place around Aviemore and Glenmore over the Easter weekend. This traffic information will help

inform further work that seeks to change the way people travel along the road between Aviemore and Cairngorm Mountain. At the end of April, Grant Moir and Gavin Miles introduced the wider Plan to local residents and businesses in Glenmore, at Glenmore Lodge.

Project planning is underway for the majority of the Heritage Horizons: Cairngorms 2030 sustainable and active travel projects.

The team have begun early stakeholder engagement, including setting up a Park-wide steering group (next meeting on 8th June).

Consultants have been appointed for the Active Aviemore and Cairngorm Active Travel Plan projects who will work with the CNPA team in the development phase.

Stakeholder Engagement

20. **National Park Partnership Plan:** Work is ongoing to pull together final materials for NPPP4, including a comprehensive pdf/print version, accessible Word document, updateable microsite, NPPP3 summary report, consultation response report and a doordrop summarising the final plan and outlining next steps. A draft of the main pdf document and consultation response report are being pulled together, and once these are signed off post-board meeting on 10 June we will convert them into online / doordrop resources for distribution later in the summer.

To keep people in the loop with developments on the Park Plan, we have been drip-feeding a series of infographics and case studies ([see a Nature example here](#)), which have also been shared with the 900+ subscribers we've engaged through the Commonplace platform. Content has included a timeline of what happens next, summaries of key findings from each of the Nature, People and Place sections, and a couple of thought pieces from third parties on themes emerging from the consultation process ([see Clare Cooper example here](#)).

Following an online protest by Grampian Moorland Group / SGA on 20 April, we [published a full statement](#) responding to key issues raised and circulated it to the media. We also [published a series of FAQs](#) to address a number of questions that had raised, produced a 500-word article for SLE's Land Business magazine, and reached out offline to representatives from a number of the parties involved.

21. **Ministerial visit:** In April we coordinated a visit from Lorna Slater MSP, Minister for Green Skills, Circular Economy and Biodiversity to the east of the Park. During her visit Ms Slater met up with members of the East Cairngorms Moorland Partnership, took in river restoration work on the River Dee and ecosystem restoration at Mar Lodge Estate, and discussed efforts to tackle raptor persecution with the North East Raptor Study Group.
22. **NLHF visit:** We welcomed a delegation from the National Lottery Heritage Fund at the end of April, to hear more about the Heritage Horizons programme and to see work on the ground as part of the Cairngorms Capercaillie Project. Feedback from

the group was overwhelmingly positive, with our progress to date in line with or ahead of others who have received Heritage Horizons funding.

We held a number of stakeholder engagement workshops for Heritage Horizons, bringing together representatives from all 24 projects to ensure our work with communities is fully coordinated. A month-by-month timeline of activity has been created, broken down by audience and engagement type, alongside an interactive map of where activity is due to take place. We are now exploring ways to combine / move stakeholder engagement activity to avoid consultation fatigue and ensure our message is clearly understood.

Communications

23. **Active Cairngorms:** We are working with the Leith Agency to pull together a digital advertising campaign on visitor management, specifically targeting those audiences we don't reach through our standard channels. The campaign, which is due to go live in June, will mostly be driven through Facebook and Instagram, and will focus on areas including responsible dog walking, wildfires, litter, toileting and wild camping. The campaign will take a positive approach from the outset, building on the premise that people want to do the right thing but don't always know how. We are also working with CBP to revisit #CairngormsTogether framework as part of this process as, whilst much of the framework is still valid, our approach needs a bit of updating post-lockdown.

Alongside the campaign, we continue to produce regular managing for visitors' content, including a recent blog about responsible dog walking (and ground-nesting bird impacts), an introduction to our new CNPA ranger team, and regular wildfire warnings in light of the recent period of dry weather.

A specific managing for visitors' comms rota continues to prove useful at weekends, with updates from partner estates and ranger services being collated and triaged via a central ranger WhatsApp group and flagged to the Comms team for posting across our social media and website channels.

24. **Cairngorms Nature:** The Cairngorms Nature BIG Weekend has dominated public engagement activity over recent months, with the team preparing for the first in-person festival for two years. Kicking off the weekend (on Thursday 12 May) was a panel event called *Landscape and Livelihoods*, hosted by TV Naturalist and wildlife filmmaker Gordon Buchanan. The event looked at how we should approach nature recovery in a living, working National Park, achieving our climate and biodiversity commitments whilst also supporting rural jobs and employment.

In addition to a [brand new website](#) and paid social media activity, we promoted the BIG Weekend through a partnership with Scotland4Kids magazine, posters in key community hotspots, a partner toolkit of resources, and a doordrop to thousands of households within and just outside the Park boundary.

25. **Press and media:** We have been working with CBP and Janice Forsyth's The Big Light on a four-part podcast series called *Cairngorms Characters*. The series showcases

the connection our residents have with the Cairngorm National Park and the influence the landscape has on them and their businesses. The series features 12 'voices of the National Park' – inspired in part by the Year of Scotland's Stories 2022 – covering themes such as nature and the outdoors, food and drink, storytelling and sports.

The first episode launched in time for the Cairngorms Nature BIG Weekend on 12 May and you can now [download all of the episodes here](#). We plan to use the podcast as a proof of concept, and to inform discussions with BBC Scotland over a longer-term broadcast plus podcast series on the people of the National Park.

26. **Heritage Horizons:** With the majority of the staff team now in place and various consultants appointed across the Heritage Horizons programme, we are now able to provide more detail on how the 24 projects will proceed over the next 12 months. Central to this is the creation of a new three-minute film – produced by the team behind our original promo video – which explains how the project hangs together and provides more detail about the individual projects involved. You can [view the new film here](#), alongside the original film we submitted to NLHF last year.

Alongside this, we have fully updated the [Heritage Horizons page](#) of the website; created a new [overview presentation](#) for use with internal and external audiences; and created short, medium and long-format descriptions and key messages to be used by HH staff, partners and consultants. This should help standardise both the look and feel, and the overall storyline of the programme going forward.

27. **Website and social media:** Work has started on the website redevelopment project, which will ultimately lead to the development of a full technical specification and suite of user journeys for a new website within the next six to 12 months. The work is due to be completed by the end of the summer. We will be holding a series of audience workshops over the next month or so with a range of key user groups to help us better understand their experiences of the current site and expectations going forward. We have already held a workshop with the Cairngorms Business Partnership, exploring how cairngorms.co.uk interacts (or doesn't) with visitcairngorms.com from a visitor and business perspective at present.

We are currently sourcing and curating content for our new [Cairngorms Voices](#) platform, in celebration of 2022's Year of Scotland's Stories. The platform has been designed to showcase the many and varied voices of the National Park, from CNPA staff to residents, land managers, businesses, conservation partners etc. In time, it will play host to blogs, photo stories, audio and video recordings etc., providing a human snapshot of the people of the Park. This will complement the new podcast series we have been working on with CBP and The Big Light (see above).

28. **Publications and branding:** We appointed creative agency Bright Signals to lead our branding review project towards the end of March and have held a number of internal workshops to inform the development of a 'brand wheel' and brand hierarchy proposal. We will bring these to the board to review in the Autumn. Alongside this, we have also conducted a review into current CNP photography and identified a lack of high quality, up-to-date imagery of people within the National Park (including

imagery that celebrates the diverse range of audiences we engage with). We are working with a number of photographers to capture specific imagery e.g. of land management activities, ethnic minority and disabled visitors / residents within the Park, urban environments in the Park, families enjoying nature, active travel etc.

We have scoped out the costs of designing, printing and distributing a regular print newsletter for the Park and included this in the budget for 2022/23 on the basis of three issues per year. The first of these will take the form of the NPPP4 doordrop, but we plan to deliver a newsletter in the new format before the end of the year.

Organisational Development

29. **Business Continuity Planning (BCP)** Increasing numbers of staff are now accessing the office and we have come to the end of the initial 3 month phased return period. From June, staff are expected to work in the office for 50% of their contractual hours unless they have specifically applied for additional home working.
30. **Staffing update:** Since March, staffing updates to 31st May are as follows:
- a) Staff who left the organisation were:
 - i. Vicky Anderson, Strathspey Farmland Wader Office. End of Fixed term contract.
 - ii. Pete Crane retired as Head of Visitor Services. Colin Simpson appointed to replace Pete, starting at the end of June.
 - iii. Vicky Walker left as Governance, Data and Reporting Manager. This post is currently being recruited
 - iv. Andy Davies, Conservation Officer. End of fixed term contract
 - v. Vanessa Altweck, Admin Intern. End of fixed term contract
 - vi. Sian Jamieson, Digital Content Manager. This post is currently being recruited.
 - vii. Stephen Corcoran, Peatland Action Manager. This post has been re specified into two posts which are currently being recruited
 - b) External appointments, following a competitive external recruitment process were as follows:
 - i. Several Seasonal Rangers joined in March/April – Blair Johnston, Gillian Gibson, Tony Seivwright, Vicky Inglis, Craig Fraser and Scott Hastings were all re-appointed after serving in the 2021 Season, with Andy Kirk and Fiona Brewis newly appointed. See Youth Employment Update below
 - ii. Fiona McNally joined as Rural Development and Communities Manager, replacing Liz Henderson who moved into the Infrastructure Manager post
 - iii. Kirsty Partridge joined as Rural Development Officer, replacing Tania Alliod who moved in to one of the Heritage Horizons posts
 - iv. Becky Wilson joined as Volunteering Manager replacing Mike Woolvin who moved into one of the Heritage Horizons posts
 - v. Emma Greenlees joined as Planning Support Officer, replacing Dot Harris who moved to the Peatland team
 - vi. Elly Milne joined as Payroll, Accounts and Finance Officer. Replacement post following restructure within the Finance Team.

31. Youth Employment:

- a) **Rangers:** Danny O'Brien, one of last year's Kickstart Trainee Rangers successfully applied for a Seasonal Ranger post this year. He was joined by Douglas Carchrie who was one of last year's interns. It is encouraging to see our investment in youth employment reaping such positive results.
- b) **Work Experience:** - Two young people (one from Grantown Grammar and one from Kingussie High School) have been placed with the Authority during term time on work experience opportunities within the Ranger team.

32. Equalities: The Authority has signed up to the LGBT Charter. This is an award which recognises LGBT inclusion in every aspect of our work. The programme will support us to undertake training and review policies, practice and resources to make sure we are meeting legislative needs, but are also as inclusive as we can be,

33. LEADER/Cairngorms Trust: Scottish Government are rolling out funding for Community Led Local Development (CLLD) activity to replace LEADER. Around £7 million has been made available for this nationally and Cairngorms has continued to be recognised as a distinct administrative area for this funding, which delivers against priorities of our transitional strategic plan and developing National Park Partnership Plan. Cairngorms Trust acting as the Cairngorms Local Actions Group (CLAG) has been offered an indicative allocation of funding for 2022/23 of £230,000. The criteria for funding deployment on CLLD are yet to be agreed by Cairngorms Trust, and any conditions to be established by Scottish Government for use of these funds are yet to be determined.

34. Cairngorms Trust: Charity activities and voluntary giving: Cairngorms Trust are in the process of reinvigorating the evolution and implementation of the voluntary giving scheme as we move further out of COVID restrictions. Just under £2,000 was received from various donations sources in the last quarter, continuing the pattern seen over recent periods. The charity has also of course been a valuable partner in supporting the access to replacement CLLD funding and wider grant giving activities.

Grant Moir
June 2022

Board Convener Report – For Information

External Engagements (28 February 2022 – 31 May 2022)

In addition to scheduled Board meetings and internal meetings, I have attended the following external engagements in my capacity as Convener of the Board since our last Board meeting.

Date	Engagement	Venue
21/03/22	Convention of the Highlands & Islands (CoHI) Spring meeting	Online
12/4/22	Upper Deeside Water Management Group	Braemar
13/5/22	Ministerial Meeting with Lorna Slater	Online
24/5/22	Alex Hogg, Scottish Gamekeepers Association	Blair Atholl
24/5/22	Chairman of Cairngorms Business Partnership (CBP)	Blair Atholl
26/5/22	Chairman of Outdoor Access Trust for Scotland (OATS)	Online

Xander McDade
Board Convener

Other Board Member Engagement Updates:

Carolyn Caddick (Board Deputy Convener)

Date	Engagement	Venue
13/5/22	Ministerial Meeting with Lorna Slater	Balloch
2-6/5/22	Europarc Conference	Austria
16/5/22	Opening of Aviemore Community Hospital Ceremony	Aviemore
23/5/22	UKNP Chairs Forum	Online
24/5/22	Alex Hogg, Scottish Gamekeepers Association	Blair Atholl
24/5/22	Chairman of Cairngorms Business Partnership (CBP)	Blair Atholl